



OPENING STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER JOHN LINDER (R-GA)
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INCOME SECURITY AND FAMILY SUPPORT
JOINT HEARING ON SOCIAL SECURITY DISABILITY CLAIMS BACKLOGS
APRIL 27, 2010

(REMARKS AS PREPARED)

Today we return to the issue of disability backlogs, about which the Ways and Means Committee has held now seven hearings – in whole or in part – during the past three years.

Compared with the level in 2008, the past two years have seen an added \$3.5 billion spent on Social Security administrative costs. That's an increase of over 35 percent. A significant share of that new spending has been for processing new claims for benefits, driven both by the recession and the aging of the baby boomers. Still, today there are a staggering 1.7 million Americans waiting in line to join Social Security's disability rolls. That is a big problem, and we should continue working to fix it.

But it is also a cautionary tale for those who think there won't be rationing and waiting lists when it comes to services under the far larger and more complicated health care programs just vastly expanded. To deny that is to deny the existence of the problems we will hear about today. Only the "backlogs" of the future won't just mean people don't get disability checks on time – it will mean people die waiting for treatment, or after receiving inadequate care.

We also know that when many of those now waiting in line for disability checks finally gain approval, they will join the nearly 13 million already collecting Social Security and SSI disability benefits checks each month. To many of us, and many Americans, neither program does nearly enough to help our fellow citizens realize their true potential, including by finding, getting, and keeping a job. On the contrary, almost no one works once they come on these programs, for which now about 1 in 16 working-age Americans qualifies. So our work is far from done.

As we will hear from Sherriff Eddie Willrich of Houston, Texas, the task of making sure the right benefits are paid to the right people takes a lot of work. But there are innovative programs – called cooperative disability investigation teams – that have a healthy 14 to 1 return on investment and are dedicated to ensuring the right benefits flow to the right people right from the start. We should give these efforts our full support. Just as it is important to make sure that those who are applying for benefits receive a timely, accurate answer about their eligibility, we need to make sure that ongoing checks are paid to the right people each month.

I look forward to all the testimony today.

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